

Teen Dating Violence Takes a Double Toll

August 1, 2005 08:41:22 PM PST

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MONDAY, Aug. 1 (HealthDay News) -- As many as one in three sexually active teenage girls may have been the victim of dating violence. And those same girls are also at a significantly higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV.

Those disturbing conclusions come from a study in the August issue of *Pediatrics*.

"Tremendous rates of dating violence are experienced among adolescents," said study author Michele Decker, a research project coordinator at the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston. "Girls who experienced dating violence are two-and-a-half times as likely to be diagnosed with STDs."

Added Dr. Karen Hopkins, a pediatrician at New York University School of Medicine: "It seems remarkable to me that there are so many girls having to deal with dating violence. Remarkable and sad. Do these girls feel like they have no alternatives? That this is better than being in no relationship at all? Do they feel they need to be in a relationship at all costs?"

Decker said the study's findings point to the need to work with teenage boys and let them know "that dating violence is not acceptable."

Hopkins agreed and said a subtle, underlying message in many forms of today's media, such as video games or music popular with teens, is that violence against women is OK, and that parents need to try to counteract that message.

According to Decker, previous research has shown that as many as one in five high school girls will experience dating violence. Since the infection rates for HIV and other STDs continue to rise in the 15- to 25-year-old age group, Decker and her colleagues believed they might find an association between dating violence and STDs.

The researchers interviewed 1,641 sexually active adolescent females from Massachusetts. In the study group, 75 percent of the girls were white, 11 percent were Latino, 8.4 percent were black and 3 percent were Asian.

The girls were asked if they had ever been hurt physically or sexually by someone that they were going out with? They were also asked if they had ever been tested for or diagnosed with an STD.

One-third of the girls that had been tested for an STD, including HIV, reported being the victims of dating violence. More than half -- 51.6 percent -- of those diagnosed with an STD had experienced dating violence, according to the study.

"This study shows this is happening all over the country. This doesn't just happen in poor communities. It's across racial groups and socioeconomic status. Teens need your supervision and they need your attention," said Hopkins.

She also pointed out that if a teenage girl is diagnosed with an STD, which is information she may necessarily have to share with her parents, her parents should try to open up a dialogue about dating violence, and look for evidence of dating violence.

Decker noted that one of the reasons the STD rate may be so high in these young women is that they may feel coerced into sexual activity and they may feel they can't request condom use.

"We know, from other work, abusive men are often very risky sex partners," said Decker.

This study points to the need for parents, teachers and anyone who regularly deals with teens to learn about dating violence, Decker added.

Both Decker and Hopkins said parents should try to keep the lines of communication open with their teens, and that parents of boys need to be concerned about this issue, too. They recommended that parents bring up the subjects of dating violence and STDs, but suggested that parents try to keep their tone non-judgmental when it comes to normal sexual activity.

More information

To learn more about dating violence, visit the [Alabama Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#).